

Distributing Leadership:

Moving from High School Hierarchy to Shared Responsibility

Observations from
the second year of
a three-year study
of small high schools
in Washington State

Autumn 2005

By

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NOTES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Small Schools Project began in September 2000, and is funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Project provides technical assistance to new small high schools and conversion schools, primarily in Washington State. Assistance is provided in several ways: through our website, professional development activities for educators and school board members, publications (generally available at no charge on our website), consultant services, and the Small Schools Coaches Collaborative. The Small Schools Project currently works with 34 high schools on an ongoing basis, 17 of which are in the process of converting from large comprehensive high schools to small, focused schools.

The Small Schools Coaches Collaborative provides technical assistance in the form of school coaches to schools that receive reinvention grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Collaborative is a partnership of the Small Schools Project, the Coalition of Essential Schools Northwest Center, and the National School Reform Faculty.

This report is based on observations from the first year of a three-year study of redesigned small high schools in Washington State. The statements and opinions of interviewees quoted in this report represent the general tenor of the comments heard by the researchers. We welcome comments and suggestions to this report; we are eager to learn from the experiences of other high schools and technical assistance providers engaged in similar work.

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The purpose of this three-year study is to understand aspects of the development of small schools and associated processes of change. The study focuses on a small group of Washington high schools that received reinvention grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In this study, we provide an initial account of the work in seven small schools in Washington State gleaned from interviews and repeated observations on-site in the various schools (for more information about the research protocol, see Appendix A). Six of these schools are located within recently converted large comprehensive schools (hereafter called “conversions”) that have been reconfigured as collections of small schools; one additional school was “already-small” by our definition (under 400 students).

This study has three primary goals: 1) studying and documenting the development of small schools within six conversions; 2) studying and documenting the development and changes in school leadership structures and responsibilities as small schools replace large, comprehensive schools; and 3) understanding and documenting the changes in already-small high schools that have received Gates Foundation grants.

Pursuit of these three research goals creates several avenues for potential contribution to the knowledge base on school redesign. First, the study seeks to understand whether theory and emerging empirical evidence about small schools are correct and the conversion of large comprehensive high schools into collections of smaller schools will enable greater individual attention to students and closer faculty collaboration on matters of teaching and learning, as well as a stronger sense of community within each small school.

Second, the study seeks to understand leadership in the context of the conversion process. Early evidence suggests that the creation of multiple small schools out of one existing large school may require new forms of leadership, more distributed in nature, featuring new roles for teacher-leadership focused on the continual improvement of teaching and learning.

Finally, the study seeks to understand the experience of already-small high schools engaged in redesign projects in the Gates initiative. Smaller size is only one structural aspect of what is a larger and more comprehensive set of changes in teaching, learning, and the development of professional community. In concept, already-small high schools may have an edge in making progress on various issues related to improving teaching and learning, given that they do not face the same structural challenges of their larger counterparts in creating new collections of small learning communities. A key issue in already-small schools is how the school community comes to view smallness as an asset, rather than a deficit, and how that affects school culture, leadership, and teaching practice.

We will produce three reports annually. We hope these reports will provide schools, districts, other technical assistance providers, foundations, and researchers with information that will be useful for understanding what happens as schools redesign—including raising expectations for all students, changing teacher practice, and expanding leadership roles and structures.

Small School Grants

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation promotes the development of new small schools in Washington State through three major strategies: *district grants*, *school grants*, and the *Achievers Program*. Unlike its national grants, which go to technical assistance providers or other outside agencies, grants in Washington are awarded directly to schools or districts, and go to rural, exurban, suburban, as well as urban areas.

The Foundation identified *Attributes of High Achievement Schools* and *Essential Components of Teaching and Learning* from the body of school research (see Appendix B). All grantees are expected to use both the attributes and components to guide their school redesign work. Graduating all students “college-ready” is another central tenet of the redesign work. High schools have long performed a sorting function and this criterion of the Gates grants means increasing expectations for those students whom American high schools have historically underserved.

One of the schools in this study is part of a *model district grant*. These grants were awarded to increase the capacity of eleven school districts and all their schools to improve academic achievement, infuse technology into the learning environment, increase professional development opportunities, and strengthen home and community partnerships. A major focus of these five-year grants, which were awarded in spring 2000, is to change district operations in ways that more clearly support school-level work. District grant guidelines were not explicit about the Foundation’s expectations for small schools or conversions.

One of the schools in this study received a *model school grant*. These grants support high achievement schools—which have a common focus, high expectations, data-driven decisions, and time for teachers to collaborate—that are better prepared to help all students achieve. Over fifty elementary, middle, and high schools have received three-year grants to create and implement new designs. The first school grant to a Washington high school was awarded in March 2001.

Five of the study schools received Achievers five-year grants. The *Washington State Achievers Program* works on school redesign within 16 high schools serving large populations of low-income students. The program’s resources are focused on improving college access for low-income students and combine academic readiness with scholarship opportunities. Students from low-income families are eligible to apply for one of 500 Achievers scholarships given annually to graduates of Achievers high schools.¹ The 16 Achievers high schools received their five-year grants in April 2001.

The seven small schools included in this report were selected for study because of their innovative design and likelihood for success. Each also receives technical assistance from the Small Schools Project and school coaches provided by the Small Schools Coaches Collaborative. We did not collect data specific to the role of school coaches, since our focus was on the work of the schools.

¹ This thirteen-year scholarship program is administered by the Washington Education Foundation as a result of a \$100 million gift from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Case Study Schools

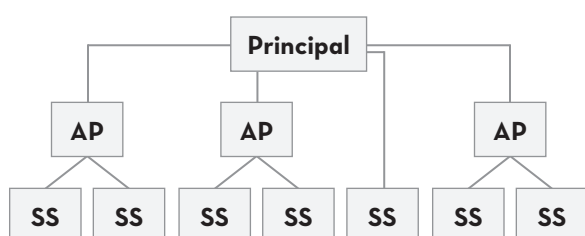
² Each of the seven small schools in this study was assigned a pseudonym.

The following school descriptions provide a snapshot of the building demographics and the history of each school’s redesign process.² Five of the small schools have completed their second year of implementation and their fourth or fifth year of the building or district grant, respectively. Birch is an exception, having completed its first year of implementation, and Fir is an already-small school. The diagrams depict the leadership structure within each building (AP denotes the assistant principal and SS denotes each small school). This information is summarized in Figure A on page viii. For a discussion on the context of school reform in Washington State, see Appendix C.

Elm is one of seven small schools in a rural high school that is part of a district-wide grant that expires in June 2005. The building houses 1,650 students, almost

all Caucasian. It is the only high school in the district. About 40 percent of the student body passed three sections (reading, writing, and math) of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) standardized test in 2004 and 12.9 percent qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Elm’s building



Soon after the district received the Gates grant, high school teachers and administrators formed research teams to investigate and develop standards related to specific areas of personalization, technology, performance accountability, individual student transition plans, instruction, and job-embedded staff development. This type of staff development allowed teachers to use the newly devised standards to move forward and design seven small schools with specific student-interest-based themes.

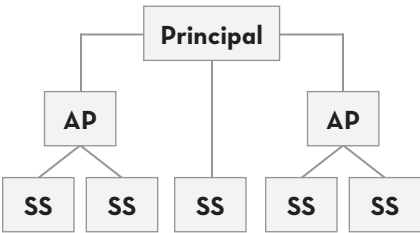
Elm serves approximately 315 students and has a staff of 14 teachers, including two teacher-leaders. The student population is over 75 percent male, possibly due to a strong focus on hands-on projects involving technology, math, and science.

The school and district administrative leadership has remained constant since the grant was awarded. The school board has been supportive of the building’s work throughout the restructuring effort. At the end of the 2004–2005 school year, Elm’s building decided to consolidate two of the small schools in order to accommodate staffing and scheduling needs that have stifled personalization and small school autonomy. With this change, the principal plans to schedule all freshmen and sophomores into their “home” small school for the core subjects.

Each small school has a contact administrator. However, the responsibilities of Elm’s assistant principal have shifted to allow her to focus exclusively on instructional leadership across the building. As a result, the other two assistant principals are working with Elm on issues such as discipline and attendance. The building has a leadership council comprised of all the teacher-leaders and the administrative staff, all of whom participate in decision making. Department chairs exist, but their roles have been greatly reduced from what they were before the conversion to small schools.

Alder is one of five small schools in a building that received a model school grant that expires in June 2005. The building has the largest population of the four comprehensive high schools in this suburban district with 94 teachers and 1,750 students. The majority of students are Caucasian. Approximately 40 percent of

Alder’s building



the students passed three sections of the WASL in 2004 and 20 percent qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Teachers at this comprehensive high school began researching small schools one year before being awarded the Gates grant. They held small group discussions during school in-service days to explore concepts such as size, autonomy, student choice, a sense of belonging, and intellectual focus. Because of this prior work, teachers had the opportunity to discuss and then vote as a staff to accept the Gates grant. A leadership committee comprised of elected teachers and the administrative leadership team directed the restructuring work, but the small schools were designed by teachers and decided upon through a “request for proposal” (RFP) process and several rounds of focus group feedback. The staff was assigned to small schools based on preference, experience, and expertise; teachers then had an additional year to plan for implementation.

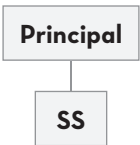
Alder has approximately 320 students and 15 teachers, including all three industrial technology teachers in the building. Because of this focus and the school’s vocational image, the student population was primarily male in the first year of implementation. Recruitment efforts by the female teachers evened out the student body in year two.

The district has been fairly hands-off throughout the conversion work, which continues with the new superintendent who arrived before the second year of implementation. The building principal who launched the conversion effort retired in July 2004. Both of his assistant principals accepted positions in other districts. The new principal chose this position because of his interest in the conversion work. As with the first year, each small school has a contact administrator.

Alder’s counselor is an equal member of the small school staff, attending all meetings and working only with Alder students. The building leadership council includes teacher-leaders and the administrative team. Most decisions are made by consensus, with input from each small school staff. But, the principal still can and does occasionally make unilateral decisions. Department chairs exist to coordinate purchases and sharing of curriculum materials as well as facilities. They are also contact people for district initiatives.

Fir is a rural already-small school, serving grades 6-12, that received an Achievers grant. The school has 150 high school students, with a majority of Caucasians and a growing population of Hispanic students. One-third of the students passed three sections of the WASL in 2004 and over one-third qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Fir’s building

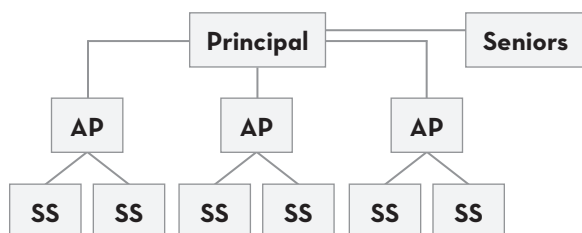


Receiving the Gates grant coincided with a desire to redesign this small, rural school using a block schedule in an effort to “go deeper” with instructional practice. During their initial grant year, staff formed a site council, de-tracked their math curriculum, and researched block schedule options. Teachers accomplished a key step when they gained district and board approval to move ahead with schedule changes and the addition of advisory periods. The second year of the grant saw some modifications to these original changes; Fir no longer has a leadership council and the schedule will change again in the coming year. Students no longer have advisory, but teachers are crafting a plan for next year. The counselor is very much a part of the staff and of the restructuring work, particularly the effort to design a workable advisory program.

The superintendent has been hands-off with the high school's reform work and some of the small school design considerations that directed the design of a new building (scheduled to open in the fall of 2007) were dropped due to budget cuts. The school principal who launched the conversion effort left in the spring of 2004 to pursue a different job opportunity. The new principal is a longtime member of this small community, having graduated from Fir himself.

Chestnut is one of six small schools in an Achievers high school. The building houses 1,750 students, more than half of whom represent minority populations. Fewer than 20 percent of the student body passed three sections of the WASL in 2004 and over two-thirds qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Chestnut's building



A small group of teachers worked on the initial grant proposal. Teachers formed a leadership team to research small schools and developed an RFP process. The small schools served grades 9-10 in the first year of implementation, except for Chestnut, which was allowed to implement 9-12 after a student survey showed they would have enough juniors and seniors sign-up. Other juniors and seniors maintained their existing high school experience in a separate small school that will phase out after both classes graduate. In the first year of implementation, one of the small schools dissolved due to lack of cohesion, but another opened in the subsequent academic year.

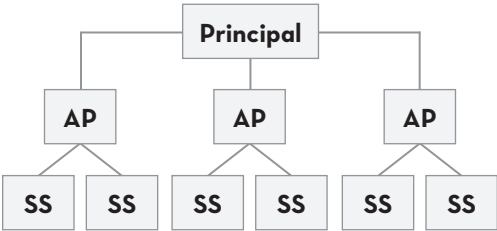
During the first year of implementation, Chestnut served approximately 180 students, well over half of whom were freshmen and sophomores, with 11 teachers. Chestnut was the only small school to advertise Advanced Placement courses, thereby attracting high achieving students to the upper grades.

The building principal who launched the conversion effort retired in July 2004 and the new principal chose the position because of his interest in the conversion work. During the first year of implementation, the school administrators worked in a comprehensive high school context. In the second year, each small school had a contact administrator. Because the senior class is not yet incorporated into the small schools building-wide, the principal oversees that cluster of teachers and students. Counselors have been slow to adapt to the small schools structure, though in the second year of implementation they divided students by small school rather than alphabetically. Chestnut's counselor has been an active contributor to the school's work since "joining" their staff. Each small school's teacher-leader participates in the leadership council meetings and, of the administrators, only the principal contributes to decision making. Department chairs exist to coordinate purchases and sharing of curriculum materials. They are also contact people for district initiatives.

Cedar is one of six small schools at an Achievers high school in a smaller suburban district. The building is one of two comprehensive high schools in the district and serves a working class neighborhood consisting of 1,950 students, two-thirds of whom are Caucasian. Approximately 24 percent of the student body passed three sections of the WASL in 2004 and 40 percent qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

The beginning of the building's conversion process coincided with a district initiative to study school reform. The staff met to identify ways to increase student achievement and concluded that small schools were a viable option. A small

Cedar’s building



leadership committee, which included the principal and several interested teachers, put together the grant proposal and met weekly to create small schools focused on career-based themes. Teachers were assigned to schools according to their preference and eventually redesigned the schools to reflect curriculum-based themes.

Cedar has international, global studies, communications, and technology themes, and serves 394 students with 17 full- or part-time teachers.

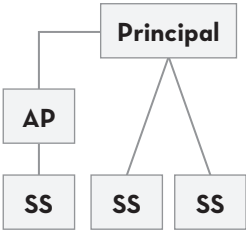
Teachers have spent a year planning a major curricular program that will direct instruction for the ninth and tenth grades. It continues a program from one of the district’s middle schools, whose students Cedar would like to recruit.

The building principal and superintendent accepted positions in other districts during the grant’s second year. The new principal was an assistant principal at the school and came to his position with a deep commitment to the small school conversion process, even though he was not included significantly in the original planning.

The small schools are paired to share a contact administrator, a counselor, and some content coaches who have replaced department chairs. Each small school’s teacher-leader attends leadership council meetings along with the administrative team. The majority of decisions are made by consensus.

Hemlock is one of three small schools at an Achievers high school—the only high school in an urban fringe district with a highly transient immigrant population. The building houses 750 ethnically diverse students. Approximately one-quarter of the student body passed three sections of the WASL in 2004 and almost half of the students qualified for free or reduced-price meals. The school has been a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools since 2000.

Hemlock’s building



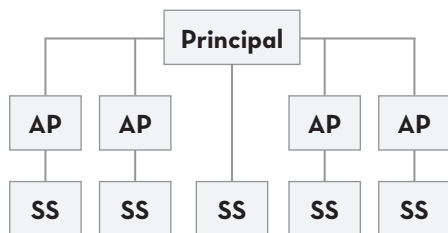
Prior to receiving the grant, the school had established a leadership committee to guide the staff in looking at building-level data and creating a common vision for the future. Teachers developed small school designs through an RFP process. The leadership committee chose the small schools and assigned staff based on teacher preferences. Hemlock has 320 students and 16 staff, including all of the building’s visual and performing arts teachers. The staffing is a reflection of the school’s intended arts focus.

The school board developed and passed a policy in support of small schools during the second year of the grant. The longtime and supportive superintendent left the district early in the grant’s third year and was replaced with an interim. A new superintendent, serving in his first superintendency, was hired at the end of the third year.

Each small school has a contact administrator and a designated counselor. The building maintains traditional department chairs and has a leadership council with broad representation from the school community. Decisions are made with a consensus model, but the principal reserves ultimate decision-making authority.

Birch is one of five small schools at an Achievers high school located in a large urban fringe district. The building has a diverse student population and is one of four comprehensive high schools in the district, serving almost 2,000 students in grades 9–12. This represents a significant increase from the previous year due to an influx of 1,200 new students and 36 new teachers in the fall of 2004 when the

Birch's building



ninth grade joined the high school. Approximately one-quarter of the student body passed three sections of the WASL in 2004 and almost half of the students qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

A core group of teachers at Birch has been planning the conversion process for three years. They have concentrated on developing a common focus and responding to district goals related to the conversion process. Birch opened in the fall of 2004 with about 200 ninth and tenth graders (all of whom were new to the high school) and 20 teachers (at least two-thirds of whom were new to the high school).

The superintendent aims to treat all schools in the district equally and not allow one school to move ahead of others in terms of school reform. The expectation is that all high schools in the district will have small learning communities for ninth and tenth grades.

Each small school in the building has a contact administrator and students are assigned to counselors according to their small school. Each small school sends two representatives to the leadership council meetings, where they discuss issues and provide input, but the principal reserves ultimate decision-making authority. Department chairs still have considerable power within the building; they meet regularly and are charged with developing department-wide end-of-semester tests as well as aligning the curriculum to Washington's Grade Level Equivalency (GLE) standards.

PREFACE

Figure A: An Overview of Redesigned Small Schools 2004–2005

	Elm	Alder	Fir	Chestnut	Cedar	Hemlock	Birch
Grade levels served in 2004–2005	9–12	9–11	9–12	9–12	9–12	9–12	9–10
Number of students & percent of building enrollment	315 (19%)	320 (18%)	150 (100%)	180 (10%)	394 (20%)	320 (43%)	200 (10%)
Number of teacher FTE	11.6	13	18.5	7	16	14.7	20
Number of teachers	14	15	19	11	17	16	20
Does the building have a leadership council	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does the teacher-leader have release time or compensation?	Stipend	.75 FTE release	*	Stipend	Stipend	Stipend	Stipend
Is counselor part of the small school staff?	Yes	Yes	*	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Is an administrator assigned to the small school?	Yes	Yes	*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does the building have department chairs?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Did the building principal change for 2004–2005?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Did the small school experience teacher-leadership change for 2004–2005?	No	Yes	*	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Did the small school's contact administrator change for 2004–2005?	No	Yes	*	Yes	No	No	Yes

* Fir is an already-small school

Carlos waited for three other teachers from his small school to arrive for the meeting. He was chairing a committee to write a proposal to fund professional development in “writing across the curriculum.” He believed these strategies could improve literacy and had seen firsthand from his students how thinking skills improved when students wrote about their own learning. Following thoughtful discussions with the other ten members of the small school staff, his committee had the go-ahead to come up with a specific proposal.

Now that his small school had established a direction toward increased integration of subjects and because teachers were collaborating more, the time seemed right to move ahead. Not only could he advocate for writing across the curriculum in the school, he could teach others how it worked, and he had the connections to bring in the experts.

Carlos had promoted this effort for years in his building and in the district. But the concept had limped along and finally gone nowhere. Regardless of the quality of an idea, the district’s chain of command made it difficult for even an excellent teacher’s idea to receive attention. It was a matter of priorities and commitments and limited pathways to the decision-makers. The district’s curriculum leaders had other pressing agenda: testing preparation, making Adequate Yearly Progress, textbook adoptions, standards implementations, and district-wide professional development. Neither the district leaders nor the building administration could know much about the individual needs of particular students or small groups of students.

However, since they had reorganized as a small school, Carlos and his colleagues knew the students better than they ever had, and they all knew the same students. They were able to collect and analyze data and know down to a particular student where the strong and weak points in learning were. Now the small school staff could consider these issues when they met during times formerly reserved for faculty meetings and department meetings. Moreover, the administration had arranged for frequent late-start days when the small school staff could have extended, quality time together. It made sense that the small school staff was in the right position to decide how to meet the specific needs of their students, while counting on the traditional administration for overall support and facilitation.

Carlos knew he was the logical person to lead the writing committee, just as Ruth, with her organizational skills and concern for detail, was the right person to systematize the registration tasks; Carrie’s training positioned her to start the Critical Friends’ Groups; Elizabeth had a handle on the tech piece; and of course Miles was a natural-born social chairman. Still others rose to the occasion as new situations emerged. No doubt about it. Leadership existed within the small school staff that made the school function well. And with the small school’s elected teacher-leader to coordinate the parts and firm up support from the building leadership, Carlos was confident of positive changes to come in both teaching and learning.

³ Carlos and his colleagues are fictitious teachers whose experiences in this vignette are based on observations of teachers in successful small schools.

“Let’s get started,” Carlos said as the other committee members walked into his room.³

Introduction

The experiences of teachers like Carlos illustrate how leadership crucial for the development of small schools moves away from traditional, hierarchical roles and functions. The creation of multiple small schools, particularly out of a single large school, elevates the necessity for many, rather than few, to assume leadership for various functions associated with helping each school to thrive. Big school leadership models that include specialized administrative functions are focused on attendance, discipline, curriculum, extracurricular activities, and the like. Principals and assistant principals continue to operate factory model schools much like those of the early 20th century. This leadership style runs contrary to small school ideals of personalization and the development of a strong professional community, which lead to improved teaching and learning.

To take advantage of smaller size, the success of a small school rests largely in the willingness of those closest to the students to step up and lead aspects of the school’s functioning that overlap with, or even replace, much of what building

administrators have done traditionally. The nature of this effort calls for a view of leadership that moves away from reliance on administrative hierarchies and toward a network of shared and distributed practice. Leadership must become the responsibility of everyone in the school.

In order to define distributed leadership for this report, we looked at what the body of research has to say:

1. *Distributed leadership is collective activity, focused on collective goals, which comprises a quality or energy that is greater than the sum of individual actions.*⁴

⁴ Bennett, et al., 2003; Pounder, et al., 1995; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2000, and Lambert, 1998

Leadership of this nature is more than just the sum of individual efforts. Implied in the idea is a conception of leadership as a necessarily distributed activity “stretched over” people in different roles rather than neatly divided among them. Researchers agree on the importance of a shared vision and the importance of focusing on teaching and learning.

2. *Distributed leadership involves the spanning of task, responsibility, and power boundaries between traditionally defined organizational roles.*⁵

⁵ Bennett, et al., 2003

Naively simple understandings of what constitutes teachers’ or principals’ work become problematic in this shift of roles and, perhaps more importantly, responsibilities for “who does what” are cracked open for negotiation. With distributed leadership, decisions about who leads and who follows are dictated by the task or problem situation, not by where one sits in the hierarchy.

3. *Distributed leadership rests on a base of expert rather than hierarchical authority.*⁶

⁶ Bennett, et al., 2003; c.f. Berman & McLaughlin, 1978

Conceptions of distributed leadership involve recognizing expertise rather than formal position as the basis of leadership authority in groups. Instead of primarily centering on the principal, the expert knowledge and skills necessary to exercise leadership for the improvement of teaching and learning resides within the larger professional community and the teachers who comprise it.

⁷ McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001

Within successful school communities, the capacity to lead is not principal-centric by necessity, but rather embedded in various organizational contexts.⁷ Researchers found no instances of administrative leaders who created extraordinary contexts for teaching by virtue of their own unique vision; nor did their study reveal any common patterns in strong principals’ personal characteristics. Successful principals were men and women with varied professional backgrounds who worked in collaboration with teachers and with respect for teaching culture. They found

various ways to support teachers in getting the job done. The leadership of these principals was not superhuman; rather, it grew from a strong and simple commitment to make the school work for their students and to build teachers’ commitment and capacity to pursue this collective goal. Perhaps most importantly, the responsibility for sustaining school improvement was shared among a much broader group of school community members, rather than owned primarily by formal leaders at the top of the organizational chart.

In this report, we are interested in understanding how the seven small schools in the study are developing strong distributed leadership structures, as well as understanding what

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

We define distributed leadership as moving away from reliance on the traditional high school hierarchy toward shared practice that embodies the following qualities:

- Leadership is shared among people in different roles.
- Leadership is situational rather than hierarchical.
- Authority is based upon expertise rather than formal position.

inhibits such growth. Our report offers a window into the work inherent in efforts to transform traditional hierarchical leadership structures in these settings.

The report is divided into two main sections. The first section, titled “What We’re Seeing,” describes early observations of the existing and emerging leadership roles and structures. It begins with a discussion of formal leadership positions, starting with that of the teacher-leader, a new position that represents the most significant change in the schools so far, followed by the principal and assistant principal. Next, the discussion explores new ways teachers are working, including participating in small school decisions and leveraging their expertise. Finally, the discussion looks at structures for distributed decision making and efforts to cultivate leadership capacity within the schools. In the second section of the report, titled “What We’re Wondering About,” we raise questions and share the concerns voiced by our study participants about the support structures and sustainability of each small school’s efforts to distribute leadership.

Leadership Roles Are Changing

After two years of data collection, we see that schools are still in the early stages of redesign. Formal leadership positions are changing and structures are emerging that move away from traditional hierarchies toward shared and distributed leadership. Teachers' participation in decision making is also growing as roles change within the new small schools. However, the seven small schools represent a considerable range in the extent to which leadership and decision making are distributed within each building. Figure C summarizes ways in which different roles within the high school structure are beginning to change, as well as ways we anticipate they may work in the future. Four of the study schools show an "emerging" level of distributed leadership, with some roles entering the realm of "systematic." The remaining three schools are still in the "beginning" stage, with leadership having changed little from the traditional hierarchy.

New Roles for Teacher-Leaders

We begin the discussion of overlapping and mutually supportive leadership functions by focusing on the responsibilities shouldered by teacher-leaders. As the leaders closest to the change, teacher-leaders in the small schools epitomize the distribution of leadership in schools and have been an integral part of the conversion process. Teachers in each of the six conversion schools elected their teacher-leader (or assigned the position to the sole volunteer). In the first year, the position was vaguely defined and the teacher-leaders "sort of made it up as we went along."⁸

⁸ In the second year of implementation, Alder's building leadership council developed a teacher-leader job description in concert with teachers building-wide. See Appendix D.

As the primary representative for their small school, the teacher-leader takes on new roles that involve broad leadership responsibilities, some of which are typically associated with school administrators (see Figure B). She is the chief facilitator of small school conversations and initiatives and brings leadership to the front-

lines of teaching. One teacher-leader feels, "the people I work with want to see me as an advocate." A teacher from a different small school staff also recognized the teacher-leader as providing the opportunity to be close to leadership daily "whereas I would not be able to interact with an administrator."

An important first challenge to leading a small school is to develop a sense of team where none existed before. Staff members come from different departments in the old structure, where they collaborated with colleagues from the same discipline. These old structures and professional relationships create a new leadership challenge for those trying to create a cohesive professional community. The challenge is intensified in the new small school when some members of the group do not yet support the idea of small schools or are resistant to the change.

Teacher-leaders are key to engaging staff by distributing leadership responsibilities. Cedars' leaders try "to promote the notion that leadership is shared among everyone. Everyone shares responsibility for leading the school." "We

Figure B: Examples of teacher-leader responsibilities

- Maintain the small school's vision
- Lead efforts to build a culture of high expectations
- Act as representative of the small school to the "big" school and to the public
- Develop professional community within the small school and across the building
- Oversee decentralized administrative tasks, such as staff meetings, budget, schedule, and graduation requirements
- Organize, analyze, and present data on student achievement
- Facilitate parent and student participation
- Coordinate the use of building-wide shared space, such as the gym, library, and auditorium

have continually pushed to get everybody involved... We think everyone should have a title." The teacher-leaders "are always asking if there's something else we need to be doing and who's interested in being on that committee."

"Everyone shares responsibility for leading the school."

Teacher at Cedar School

Teacher-leaders initially focus on organizing and facilitating staff meetings as well as acting as the conduit of information between the "big" and "small" schools. Hemlock's teacher-leader described his priority in the second year of small school implementation as "Just trying to get [the small schools committees] to be as good as possible and get people to integrate into the theme as much as possible." He hopes to be a "goalie" to protect the rest of the academy from administrative work so that they can focus on their team jobs and teaching.

Some teacher-leaders have grown beyond this role to direct the small school's mission, facilitate parent communication, and assume instructional leadership. One of Cedar's leaders explained how her "goal has changed" from being a "meeting leader," facilitating discussions and disseminating information, to supporting changes in classroom practice.

Frequently I am checking in with people... making sure that things that we're trying to do in the small school, [such as plans for a new curriculum and publicly recognizing student success] are going well. I want us all to be in each other's rooms. And I guess there's no other way to do it except to model it. [My co-teacher-leader] and I are both really aware of the fact that if we are asking our fellow staff members to do these things, we've got to show the way; we've got to be examples.

Cedar's teacher-leaders wrote an operational plan that concentrated on giving teachers the "tools to change" rather than working on the nuts and bolts issues related to high school conversion. Their plan focused on two things: meetings that centered around improving "teaching and learning in specific ways that will be manifested in their classrooms this year" and encouraging all teachers to do a little more risk taking.

School and district administrators in some contexts recognize the important role played by teacher-leaders in the reform. Hemlock's superintendent perceives teachers' leadership as the key to the conversion effort. "Teacher leadership is probably the most significant factor in creating achievement. To empower a teacher,

"Autonomy is really looking at teacher leadership and using that leadership to foster high instructional quality."

Superintendent for Hemlock School

to know where the target is, [and] give them the creativity and freedom to get there. Be it through their strengths in pedagogy, via their strengths in subject matter, via their strengths in the ability to relate to kids—whatever methodology that attunes to their strengths. I think sometimes autonomy can get misconstrued as, 'I don't have accountability.' Autonomy is really looking at teacher leadership and using that leadership to foster high instructional quality."

Similarly, Alder's building principal sees the teacher-leader as the instructional leader for their school. "The administrators can deal with the nuts and bolts kinds of things, the structural stuff... because we want your conversation to be about what's going on in your school instructionally and how you as a teacher-leader can support that."

WHAT WE'RE SEEING

Figure C: The Nature of Distributed Leadership

This continuum describes what we're seeing and what we anticipate is likely to happen (in gray) in the seven redesigned small schools, within the Washington State school reform context. While the nature of school leadership is highly contextual, the continuum examines changing areas of focus for both traditional and non-traditional leaders. Consistent with our data, the likely form or substance of administrative positions is less clear than that of the teacher-leader and teachers, so the principal and assistant principal roles are described at two points with gray text.

	Beginning	Emerging	Systematic	Sustainable
Teacher-Leader	Teacher-leader is “named” on a paper structure. Limited actual change in day-to-day work. May serve as a representative of the small school to a building-wide leadership council.	Teacher-leader has increasing authority focused on management and structure issues at the small school level (e.g., setting agendas for small school meetings and facilitating process). Some peer recognition of authority.	Teacher-leader serves as an advocate for the small school to the building. Work within the small school includes: maintaining the vision, organizing and presenting data, facilitating parent and student participation, and developing a professional community [†] that promotes collaboration and group decision making.	Teacher-leader's work within the small school centers on strengthening teacher collaboration to improve instructional practice; supporting a professional development agenda that reflects this improved instruction; and aligning resources in support of student learning. The teacher-leader's chief responsibility continues to be building leadership capacity of teachers.
Teachers	Teachers assume some decision making as members of the small school staff. They choose teacher-leaders and instruct teacher-leaders how to represent the school's needs and concerns to the principal and leadership council.	Teachers assume some decision-making authority for curriculum and instruction in their small schools. They agree on structures, standards, and on small school requirements in the context of building, district, and state policies.	Teachers collaborate to make decisions regarding student schedules, course offerings, and program sequences. Individual teachers take over leadership of specific situational tasks; e.g., new curriculum, integrated classes, student conferences, and changes in instructional practice.	Teachers collaborate to present instruction, originate teaching strategies, design professional development to support teaching and learning, develop mutual accountability, take responsibility for individual student success, and decide with other teachers, parents, and students each student's learning program.
Principal	Principal has a traditional “chain of command” role. He or she directs the overall vision for the reform work and directs a building-wide focus on issues such as classroom practice and rigor. Alternatively, the principal adopts a “hands-off” approach and does not lead the reform work at all.	Principal takes on the specific leadership of one or more small schools and delegates leadership of other small schools to the assistant principal(s). Principal continues to focus on building-wide management and structural issues in concert with the leadership council. Principal facilitates using school resources to support instructional improvement.	Principal cultivates leadership capacity and focuses on instructional leadership across the small schools by involving teachers in instructional decision making. Teachers become aware that principal does not claim to have all the answers. Principal hands problem solving back to teachers, coaching and leading for teacher efficacy.	Principal takes on a lower profile in the building, focusing on facilitation and co-participation. Alternatively, the principal becomes a building manager or the position of building principal disappears altogether.

[†] For a discussion of professional community in the seven study schools, see *Elevating the Conversation: Building Professional Community in Small High Schools* at <http://www.smallschoolsproject.org>; look under “Small Schools In Action/What We Are Learning.”

	Beginning	Emerging	Systematic	Sustainable
Assistant Principals	Assistant principal has traditional building-wide responsibilities, such as student discipline and teacher evaluation.	Assistant principal is assigned to a small school, but maintains some building-wide responsibilities.	Assistant principal focuses on supporting professional learning, encouraging teacher collaboration in instruction, and cultivating community connections for one or two small schools.	Assistant principal focuses on the day-to-day operation of a small school, supporting and facilitating instructional decisions made by the small school staff. Assistant principal may report directly to the district office.
Leadership Council	Leadership council remains from pre-grant school. Often, a parallel group is created to focus on school redesign.	Leadership council consists of representatives from each small school and the building administrators. Members make decisions by consensus. However, the principal reserves ultimate decision-making authority. Decisions focus on building-wide structural issues, often constraining small school autonomy.	Leadership council membership broadens to include community members and students in decision making. Principal operates as an equal member of the group for decision making. Development of agenda rotates among teacher-leaders and decision making involves reciprocal conversations back and forth with small schools.	Leadership council's focus shifts to transfer more authority for decision making to the individual autonomous small schools. Maintains focus on larger school capital issues and the coordination of whole school programs, such as athletics.

Considering the demands being placed on teacher-leaders—overseeing the organization of their small schools, acting as instructional leaders to their peers, and teaching classes—it is no wonder that all of them talked about being overwhelmed. None of the teacher-leaders received administrative training in the first year of implementation and all of them struggle to balance their new responsibilities with their original priority, teaching.

The responsibilities of teacher-leader seemed to be so great that, for a couple of years, I wasn't a very good teacher. I think that I didn't know how to balance it. I either had to focus on [small school] stuff or I had to focus on what was going on in my classroom. And I couldn't do both.

There are so many things to get done. I feel that sometimes the stuff we really need to get done is being pushed on the back burner. Like, what is our curriculum going to be? How is it actually going to work next year?

Teacher-leaders shared feelings of frustration over the amount of time required for their new leadership positions and the never-ending list of tasks to be completed. “There’s just too many things, too many balls to try to keep in the air.” Tensions developed when teacher-leaders’ roles and authority were not well defined. “In this position, the teacher-leader doesn’t have any true authority... It’s sort of a strange position to be in. It’s not a true management position at all. It’s more a facilitator position, managing resources, trying to stop problems from happening, and sort of being a cheerleader.” Frequently, the teachers who have taken on these new leadership roles lack the capacity to be effective leaders, an issue that does not go unnoticed by their colleagues who are resistant to change. “We have leaders who are teachers who have been thrust into this leadership role who don’t have the training or qualifications to deal with it... [And] we have teachers who are unwilling to view our leaders as leaders because they are teachers and they are younger.”

Two of the teacher-leaders had additional concerns about how their role may be perceived by their peers, as they tread a fine line between the administrative role and the teacher role. One person “worried that given a title, people would really be not accepting of me, that people would see me as a ‘them’ instead of an ‘us’.” I worried that I wouldn’t be trusted and I worried that my relationships with my colleagues would change because now I wouldn’t be a peer.” These fears came true for another teacher who felt isolated from her colleagues once she became a teacher-leader. “A number of relationships that I... had with people prior to this work have been greatly challenged by this work. Particularly with the people who were my mentors initially when I started... And now [because of] my position of power in the building, that relationship has changed and I don’t get invited to go to the plays anymore; I don’t get invited to do this and that and it’s really sad for me.”

At least one teacher-leader enjoyed the balance between administrative and teaching responsibilities, perceiving the opportunity as the best of both worlds. “The nice thing about what we’re doing is that you don’t have to leave the classroom. You really can be a teacher and be a leader... Granted, that’s going to get more challenging, but I think that’s great.”

In the four schools with more distributed leadership, teacher-leaders are creating greater connections between staff members and administrators and they are leading teachers in making more decisions, many of which are at the small school level. To a large extent, a teacher-leader’s success depends upon the support, per-

mission, and advocacy of the building principal. Without it, teacher-leadership will struggle to be more than a token gesture.

New Roles for Building Administrators

The data indicate that the roles for administrators in conversion schools are shifting. To begin, administrators are identifying the small schools' need for individual attention. "I think you need a leader for each school whose job it is to nurture that school... It could be an assistant principal or a teacher-leader; it is about somebody who is skilled enough or whose job it is to nurture that school and

"I think you need a leader for each school whose job it is to nurture that school."

Assistant principal

take that school to the next level instructionally, programmatically, all the things that need to happen." But, while they support the small schools and teachers' leadership, administrators still have whole-school management responsibilities.

Principal The building principals in all seven schools direct the overall vision for the reform work and maintain the focus on the central issues such as classroom practice and rigor.

They also steer conversations concerning specific dilemmas, such as supporting student choice of courses and the potential compromise of small school autonomy. Principals commonly puzzle through complex issues on behalf of the entire building—such as scheduling, personnel issues, and accountability pressures from the community—and deal with the "tyranny of the urgent" that characterizes the fast-paced nature of their day. Teachers perceive principal leadership as being most effective when it supports a system of shared decision making and empowers each small school to develop its own personality. Hemlock's building principal summed up his challenge as a balancing act where he "can't just be strictly facilitative or authoritarian... [I] have to be facilitative with muscle."

Elm's building principal feels that the job is "much different than it was four or five years ago." Because they are still transitioning to small schools, "it feels like we're doing both systems simultaneously. Kind of the comprehensive high school and a small school. So it feels like you're doing two jobs instead of one." Some of the ongoing, big picture questions that he deals with are "What are we going to do with foreign language? What are we going to do with pre-AP classes? What are we going to do to develop a greater flavor, or distinction, with our small schools so the kids know what it means to be a part... of each small school?" But, in the second year of implementing small schools building-wide, the real focus has been on instruction. For the first time, the administrative team spent a full day collecting and analyzing baseline data on instructional practice in order to develop a picture of what currently exists.

"Six of us visited almost a hundred classroom sessions... in one day... And actually marked our observations down in fifteen-minute walkthroughs. And then we compiled that data—both what we can quantify and... our comments and observations." For each walkthrough, the team had to talk to three students, asking: What are you learning today? And what's the target for learning? They then marked down whether the students could tell them or not. "What we're trying to do is measure growth... and we're trying to do it systematically instead of intuitively."

Cedar's principal is somewhat staggered by his new role, having joined the staff midway through the second year of planning the conversion. But at the same time, he is challenged and excited by the possibilities. "It's almost like a dandelion. [I'm] trying to pull the root out all the way and start fresh... so that's kind of exciting." He described the role of the principal as, "being the CEO of six different companies... that are making six different products under my umbrella."

Alder's principal expressed a sense of loss in giving up some of his authority. As the contact-administrator for only one small school, he reported feeling "out of touch" with what was happening in the rest of the building. He also felt that the school was worse off without one overall administrator keeping an eye on everything.

There needs to be somebody who has time to go out to all the small schools and sit in some of their meetings and be... somebody who is not connected with a small school but able to maintain a connection with all the small schools... and tries to see the big picture of how they are all working... together under one roof... I feel much more out of touch with people this year than I have ever felt before.

Hemlock's building principal has gained several insights into the challenges of his new role, which includes being "all things to all people." He is realistic about the impact of distributed leadership on his role as principal and strives to create transparency in his decision-making process in order to build such skills in others.

I have learned that in order to be successful as a leader when your school is going through significant reform, contrary to popular belief, you do have to be all things to all people. You do have to support them at a personal level while trying to lead the school at a structural level... You have to perpetuate in a way that everybody, whether they are a leader or not, feels that they have a claim on you and that they can come to you and that they are important to you... You really, really have to believe in your people and you have to understand that everybody has an important role to play.

One of the things I started doing this year is I started sharing with people the information I used to make decisions. So if I would previously just say no to something, now I say here is the information and this is why it is no and let me explain to you what my world looks like when I am making this decision—here are the dynamics I am working with, here are the things I weigh—and this takes time, but it strengthens the relationship and builds knowledge in the staff and helps bring them into the loop.

While these quotes reflect the principal's ideals, teachers feel that his actions sometimes do not match what he says. One teacher called into question the role of the building-wide small schools council because the principal "has used his veto or top-down decisions on a majority of the issues the [council] has discussed so far this year."

Birch is another example of how not all principals are rethinking their roles or adopting a distributed leadership style. One teacher said, "The principal is still in charge of most everything." Another explained, "The principal, I feel, tells all of us what will happen and he has a system around here about a chain of command. I have been trying all week to talk to him and you have to go through this person here and they go to him and then the secretary does his schedule." A third teacher added, "I see (the principal) as maintaining that invisible line between administration and teachers... He has a closed-door policy."

One explanation for the tightly held leadership is that Birch's building added a ninth grade at the same time it began implementing small schools. Administrators

are now focused on daily management of the larger student body rather than the long-term conversion effort. One teacher explained, “There’s a perception that because there are more students things will be more chaotic. So [we] try to create something that controls it more. And it is controlled and there is a lack of democratic decision making and there is definitely a lack of focus of where we want to go.” In short, Birch’s teachers feel that the building leadership is still operating as a comprehensive high school.

Assistant Principal By the second year of implementation, five of the small schools in a conversion site had an assistant principal assigned to them. Their roles and responsibilities vary, but include overseeing the budget and administrative responsibilities delegated to the small schools as well as general teacher support. Chestnut’s assistant principal saw her leadership role as being service-oriented, “What do the teachers need to do their jobs well? Do they need clipboards, do they need whiteboard pens, you know ... Do I need to talk to some kids about their behavior that’s disruptive? ... What can I do to clear your plate to make ... it so that you can do your job well?” The assistant principal at Alder echoes this sentiment, “I like to think of myself as helping to create and maintain conditions for them to get their work done.” Chestnut’s building principal expects the assistant principals to have the instructional expertise to meet the needs of the small

schools and sees the need to develop a culture where “they are seen as resources, as opposed to people who do discipline and may come to a meeting or two.”

Some assistant principals have been able to move toward an instructional leadership role, but each of them is torn between spending time with their small school(s) and becoming mired in “administrivia” and school-wide issues. Communication between the assistant principals and

the small school staffs at three of the schools was infrequent. All of the assistant principals in the six conversion schools have additional responsibilities, such as oversight of an additional small school, student discipline and attendance, building-wide programs, and district initiatives. Cedar’s assistant principal expressed frustration at having to miss both his small school staff meetings in order to attend a district meeting at his principal’s request.

Work overload has left some assistant principals stuck in building-wide issues and unable to focus on their small school(s). This can also cloud the chain of command.

As far as [the assistant principal] being really involved in the [small school], we have a long way to go ... [The principal] put, in my opinion, a lot of work on [the assistant principal]—anything he doesn’t want to do—oftentimes it’s whole school, like discipline ... and that kind of takes all of his time up and so he doesn’t have much time for anything else ... He just doesn’t have any time.

And so, figuring out when I’m supposed to be talking to [the principal] and when I’m supposed to be talking to [the assistant principal] is another issue ... that I haven’t figured out.

Cedar’s assistant principal talked about a kind of leadership that was not mentioned by the school’s staff. She has made it a point to know all the students in her small schools well. When referrals for misbehavior or attendance problems come up, she is able to interact with students with great skill. Because she has

“I want to have conversations with [teachers] in terms of what they’re doing and what they’re thinking...so that we work together.”

Assistant principal of Alder School

“concentrated on building relationships,” discipline referrals, detentions, fights, suspensions, and attendance referrals “have gone way down.”

The assistant principal for Alder also talked about the importance of nurturing relationships with teachers and students within the small school in order to build trust.

It's really important for me to feel like I'm part of the school. So I want to have conversations with [teachers] in terms of what they're doing and what they're thinking, what they need, how I can help, what I know that could add value to what they're doing and what I need to know so that I can be more aligned with the work of the school, so that we work together. A lot of the informal conversations are, in part, about just building relationships with teachers and with students... I notice that the more I'm in classrooms, the more students interact with me positively, even when we're in a disciplinarian... a not-so-positive situation... They're maybe a little more trusting of me.

The difference between doing this in a small school rather than a comprehensive high school is that the administrator “spends a lot more time in fewer people's rooms and [has] a lot more conversations about curriculum and instruction... because [she is] not trying to go everywhere and talk to everybody.” This assistant principal's rapport with teachers allows her to be responsive to their needs for an instructional leader. For example, an Alder teacher tapped her one morning to observe his first period class and offer feedback. This kind of invitation for communication requires a teacher's trust and an administrator's flexibility, and presents an opportunity for both to learn.

Elm's assistant principal continues to redefine her role. In the building's second year of implementing small schools for all students, she took on an entirely instructional leadership role and has developed a professional-growth-oriented, coaching approach to instructional supervision and evaluation. The building principal relieved her of virtually all management duties. In return, she is responsible for the 40 core content (English, math, social studies, science) teachers across the building and holds those teachers accountable for improvement through an evaluation process, which includes pre- and post-observation meetings and classroom walkthroughs. The goal of adopting this new role is to integrate professional learning and evaluation. This way, evaluation becomes a function of professional learning and not simply an annual performance review.

The principal notes, “A day doesn't go by where [the assistant principal] is not in classrooms having those everyday coaching conversations.” The assistant principal agrees that the effort is paying off. “Nobody walks past me without talking to me about instructional issues.... Now is it just me they're having that conversation with? I don't think so. I think it's much, much broader.” But the work of building teachers' skills to be able to do “what we ultimately want to do” has only just begun. While this effort is not organized around small schools, both the assistant principal and the principal identify strong connections between the two change efforts.

The fact that [the high school] battled [within itself] for three or three-and-a-half years about small schools and then successfully stepped into that realm taught everyone in the building that it is possible to change, that people are capable of growth, that people are able to implement things they learn and that leadership must be distributed. ...I can't imagine having the kind of relationship with teachers that I have, starting with last year, around instruction. I mean, they were so ready for instruction to be the program [this year]. So ready. Let's do instruction because that's what everybody else is doing.

We believe that by structuring our school more effectively in a small schools type environment ... we're putting teachers and students in a better position to learn at high levels. Structure is a necessary, but insufficient, condition for raising student learning to the ... level of what our vision should be.

New Roles for Teachers

Nearly every role in the conversion schools looks different, to some degree.

Teachers in particular have a broader range of situational responsibilities. These typically include leading an advisory, planning activities and curriculum to real-

"We are all very much an integral part of the leadership. No one person can do it all."

Teacher

ize their small school's vision, and completing administrative tasks once fulfilled at the building level—on top of a regular teaching schedule. A natural outgrowth of this additional workload is the necessary collaboration and distribution of tasks between and among teachers within the small school. In three of the conversion schools, teachers spoke about a new sense of accountability as well.

We are all very much an integral part of the leadership. No one person can do it all ... we are very good about jumping in and helping. I think it is very much a shared leadership with one person as the ultimate leader.

The principal and the teacher-leaders have begun to count on a culture of distributed leadership, especially in [our small school] ... what we've learned here at [the school] is the principal isn't the only leadership position in the building and teachers are taking leadership responsibilities.

[Within Chestnut] there are certain tasks that need to be done and people stepping up to the plate now who never did before and putting in extra time to do things. ... We're dividing and conquering, trying to get as much bang as we can from each staff member for the types of trainings and leadership skills to keep [Chestnut] moving along.

Chestnut teachers discuss everything before agreeing to anything with the leadership council and decided early on that they didn't want a "dictatorial process" within the small school. Therefore, more people are involved in the decision-making process than before. "Before you would just blame [a decision] on the principal or vice-principal but now more people have a part in it, so it gets spread out and shared."

Birch's building rotates all their teacher-leaders annually, which "has been working really well ... giving people a chance that may not necessarily have been leaders to come forward with some skills." This system is giving teachers who might not typically take leadership roles a chance to participate in leadership council meetings and take "more ownership." However, the principal has frequently tapped the newer teachers to take advantage of these leadership opportunities, and their lack of teaching experience influences the nature of teacher-leadership within the building.

The data indicate that teachers in the seven small schools take on short-term, "just in time" leadership for one-time tasks, as well as long-term leadership connected to teaching and learning goals. For example, one Cedar teacher coordinates the implementation of a new school-wide curriculum, another handles student recognition, another coordinates special events, and yet another works with student participation in community projects. A teacher explained that the topic of shared leadership is "less of a focus because now it's a given ... it's becoming a habit."

In order to lessen the teacher-leader's workload, Hemlock teachers are arranged into three special teams: ninth grade, student support, and theme. Each teacher in the small school serves on one team, which meets and does work on teachers' own time. This gives people "specific tasks so they can kind of focus on what they're going to spend their energies on. And also not have to worry about being put upon too much by just random things that creep up throughout the year."

Of course, not everyone takes advantage of the leadership opportunities. A comment from one teacher at Cedar indicates that a few teachers are carrying the process forward. "There are standout teachers who take on duties above and beyond and we really count on those people." Participation also appears to be a bit lopsided according to at least one administrator from Hemlock who said; "It is interesting to see who is emerging out of this as [a] leader and who is choosing not to. Our newer, younger staff people are right in there, working it, reflecting upon it, debating it in a very healthy way. The older members are still holding back and judging from a distance."

While all teachers do not participate to the same extent, and some may simply not choose to, the data indicate that teachers in the small schools enjoy the freedom and opportunity to exercise leadership and develop their expertise. Working together as a small school staff is creating a culture of shared leadership and accountability. As teachers increase their level of collaboration, they rely less on formal authority. Two themes emerged as evidence of how teachers are working differently—they are making use of individuals' expertise and leveraging the collaborative culture for more efficient decision making and curriculum planning.

Leveraging Expertise In establishing the direction of teaching and learning within their small school, school staff members are making use of individual teachers' expertise. Three of the small schools displayed an emerging practice of tackling a school issue under the leadership of the most qualified staff member, regardless of where this person ranked within the traditional high school hierarchy. In each instance, a teacher responded to a situation rather than waiting for an authority figure to respond simply because of her role within the building. The following examples span the topics of classroom practice, professional development, and student assessment.

Alder is newly responsible for implementing the senior project, which was previously a building-wide initiative. The humanities teachers recognized this as an opportunity to create a more rigorous program than existed before and as a way to offer much-needed English credit. Now, a humanities teacher coordinates the senior project class, where a group of teachers engages with the students they will later teach in humanities classes. In this way, a team of teachers works with each student to help him or her complete the project.

The district was thinking about increasing English credit requirements and we felt the...previous [senior project] model lacked some rigor... So, we made it an English-credited class and we added a really in-depth research project component. Formerly it was a two-trimester class and we've combined it into one tri—but we've also linked it with our Humanities 12 class so... there will sort of be a team of teachers working with them intensely this tri in their project class. But then the remainder of the year, their advisor, their humanities teachers, and so forth, will be helping them finish those.

At Hemlock, a veteran English and drama teacher described why she decided to step-up and lead her small school's end-of-the-year demonstration of student

work. She was concerned by the lack of rigor and a student perception that “anything goes.” She brought her ideas to the teacher-leader who supported her in taking the lead. “Everyone was maxed out and yet it had to be done ... and at this point it’s the main way that I could contribute.”

Flexibility for Decision Making Teachers are making decisions about what happens in their small schools and their classes, rather than having to follow what often appears to be disjointed building or district mandates. In four of the small schools, teachers discussed the opportunities to devise and implement curriculum and instructional changes quickly and efficiently after the conversion. Alder’s

“We love it that we can make a decision in one day and it can be implemented the next.”

Teacher at Alder School

teachers credit their newfound flexibility to the smaller staff size and the increased communication between and among its teachers. “If there were 25 [people on the staff], the formality of the conversation would need to increase and we would need to use more rules to be able to communicate.

We love it that we can make a decision in one day and it can be implemented the next because we are a small group and we are making things happen that way.” One administrator

noted that some teachers feel frustrated at the range of decisions they must make as school initiatives become more decentralized, but “they make decisions faster” and there are “lots of different examples of the schools wanting to try something different, being able to talk about it, and do that.”

Alder teachers have used this flexibility to join forces and accomplish curricular goals. For example, the three humanities teachers collaborated to design and teach a weekly after-school humanities seminar. Fashioning a core program for ninth graders was another objective the entire staff agreed upon. One teacher spearheaded the effort to learn strategies for reading across the curricula and everyone participated in professional development activities.

Cedar’s staff embarked on a comprehensive change in the way they organize curriculum and instruction. They are planning to institute a rigorous program for all ninth and tenth graders, which continues a program offered in one of the district’s middle schools. One of Cedar’s teachers has taken on the substantial leadership role of coordinating this very complex startup, but says, “We are completely staff driven. Our staff chose to do this and made this commitment. ... And it’s really an interesting dynamic when that accountability falls on you.”

Chestnut’s teachers are also taking the initiative to build a coherent teaching practice across the small school. The teacher-leader insists that everyone have training on the same few curricular programs. For example, all ninth grade teachers must know the Jane Schaffer Writing Program “because it permeates everything we do in all of our classes ... We codified all of our vocabulary. ... So if the science teacher says something about ‘concrete detail,’ they know that they’re going to get the facts out of the book. When [the English teacher says] ‘concrete detail,’ they know they are going to get the facts out of the story.” This staff also prides itself on offering an Advanced Placement curriculum and encourages teachers to take the training every year. Teachers reviewed student achievement data to determine which classes would reinforce skills and collaborated to prepare students throughout the four grades for the senior-year culminating project.

New Structures for Distributing Decision Making

Teacher-leaders represent their small school to the larger building through a leadership council, where they work with administrators to coordinate building-wide concerns such as common behavioral standards, facility use, student registration, and open houses. This structure ensures that decision making is shared between administrators and teachers more than in the traditional top-down model.

All six conversion schools have some form of a leadership council. Decisions are typically made by consensus, such that no one opinion carries more weight than another. But, in four of the schools, the principal reserves ultimate decision-making authority. Hemlock's model differs from others in that the leadership council includes students, parents, and representatives from departments that are still associated with the building as a whole, such as special education and English Language Learners.

Making decisions through a leadership council shifts accountability for the choices made from the hierarchical model to a more reciprocal model because both administrators and teachers participate. It also reduces the perception of "backroom decision making" by creating a transparent process that considers input from a wider group of people—namely teachers in each of the small schools. One teacher explained, "There have been a lot of decisions that we have made and been able to push for because we've brought things into the open."

The effectiveness of the leadership council varies among the six conversion sites. Several teachers at Birch talked about the relationship between the small school and the building administration as "us and them." The teachers in that school felt that administrators (either building or district) made decisions before the leadership council was asked for input. Some went so far as to describe a "hidden agenda" on the part of administration.

For example, we were planning our brochure for our school... I felt that they led us to believe that we had some control over that. Then we would submit something and it would come back with 'well, this is what we really wanted.' It was sometimes frustrating. If you know what you want, why don't you just tell us that instead of trying to make us think it was our idea?

They never ask us [for our opinion] so I feel devalued and unsupported. In the process, we keep being dictated from the top down. We just don't feel part of all that, we feel like puppets.

While Chestnut's teachers perceive their building's leadership council as "driving the change," the previous principal was a non-voting member. He believed that, "Unless I can present my information and issues in such a manner that you understand, believe in, can see my point, want to change to that or need to go in that direction... I certainly shouldn't have a bully-pulpit or the power to make you, whether I want to buy into listening back to you or not." But, without equal participation in the process (and therefore accountability), attending the leadership council meetings became less of a priority for the principal than competing demands. A district administrator noted, "I like the fact that [teachers] have taken a leadership role and [are] moving forward, but it would also be good if they had more leadership from an administrative team." Chestnut's new building principal is dealing with the opposite issue, where he is involved to the extent that he feels he is directing things too strongly. "I have come in and taken a greater degree of interest and control over the experience. But I want to be careful. In fact, we

had a meeting a few weeks ago where I said, '[leadership council] isn't working real well. I'm talking too much.' We're asking for input from teachers for agenda development, but we're not getting it."

"As an administrative team, we have tried to take a step back and be supportive."

Principal of Alder School

The new principal at Alder is increasing the leadership capacity among his school's teacher-leaders by rotating the responsibility for setting the leadership council meeting agenda. "We are trying to find ways to [build] leadership capacity among the teacher-leaders. We felt like, as long as we were there kind of steering the ship, we weren't going to be drawing leadership from these folks. So as an administrative team, we have tried to take a step back and be supportive."

Because small schools within a building vary in their level of success, the leadership council meetings can be an opportunity for teacher-leaders to share ideas and support one another. They can also become a place of competition and stress when teacher-leaders espouse different understandings of the small schools effort. One teacher-leader explained how she came to understand part of her job as supporting the success of the other small schools in the building, or risking the failure of her own.

I tried to shield my staff from a lot of this nonsense that was going on [in the rest of the building]. Because we seemed to be doing so well ... and yet in [the leadership council] we were still talking about ... the large school falling apart ... and it had nothing to do with student success within the small school. It was all about ... "We can't lose the traditional high school." ... And I said, "This is the first year we've done small schools. If we don't put energy into the survival of the small schools [that puts] those small schools in danger." I guess instead of putting all my energy into taking care of [my small school] ... Maybe I should have tried to take care of the rest of the school at the same time.

Leadership councils threaten the traditional departmental structure and tension sometimes exists between the old and new governing bodies. While all of the schools maintained department chairs through the second year of implementing small schools, four of the schools saw them meeting less frequently and playing a smaller role in decision making than teacher-leaders. Department chairs still earn stipends and receive a budget to order books and other classroom supplies. It remains unclear for several schools whether or not that budgetary system makes the most sense. Science may require a building-wide budget, but language arts and social studies may benefit from integrated management within each small school. One administrator questioned, "Do you budget by department or [small school] or department *in* [a small school]? ... Our [small schools] do not receive a budget right now."

Complications arise when interconnected decisions are made by two different entities—the leadership council and the department chairs. At Birch, "The department head will be in charge of curriculum and making sure we're in line with district and state standards ... but the [leadership council] will make decisions about what program to propose or some of the decisions about crossovers." Teachers there were concerned when the department chairs were not asked for input into the scheduling process. "Now we must schedule English and we must schedule math and how do we know that some of those people in those departments would really like to teach [a particular] course? ... [The principal] said that

we would ask all the teachers what they would like to teach, but we didn't see that list."

As schools make the transition toward more distributed leadership, teachers and administrators have few precedents to follow. This issue of *who* makes decisions is still evolving. Teachers and administrators are growing into their new positions within the leadership council and feelings of empowerment as well as pain are proven parts of the change process.

New Structures to Build Leadership Capacity

⁹ Lambert, 1998

Linda Lambert⁹ defines leadership capacity as broad-based and skillful participation in the collective work of leadership. Schools exhibited budding efforts to develop leadership capacity among teachers. The most striking example of this occurred in Alder's building, where in the second year of implementing small schools, the principal used grant money to give each teacher-leader .75 FTE release time to devote to the responsibilities of the position. Alder's teacher-leader, who was elected to the position the previous spring, claims that there is time now for him to do the preparatory work, planning, and attending to nuts and bolts issues that the school requires. The goal for this one-year-only generous planning time is to develop teachers' leadership capacity, which will carry over in following years. If nothing else, this time devoted to teacher-leadership frees fellow staff members from the mechanical details of running the school and permits them to concentrate on classroom practice.

Alder's principal is considering reallocating that building's department chairs' stipends to continue the teacher-leaders' release time once the grant money runs out. Chestnut's principal has sought a similar arrangement by asking the district to redefine contract language so that "they don't speak specifically of department heads, but instead talk about teacher-leaders." This would provide "the flexibility to identify teacher-leaders and pay them for their work out of that attractive money."

Teacher-leader release time is one example of how professional development opportunities are more commonly organized at the building level than the district or small school levels. The following cases from three schools show that building-level efforts are mainly focused on small groups, either the teacher-leaders or teacher volunteers. However, these efforts are mounted with the intent that participants will capitalize on the experience and advance the development of their individual small schools.

¹⁰ Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) are typically groups of six to eight colleagues who agree to meet regularly and to look closely at one another's practice. For more information about CFGs, see Kathleen Cushman's article in the May 1998 edition of *Horace*

Alder's teacher-leaders regularly meet in a Critical Friends Group¹⁰ (CFG) setting for the purpose of professional development. They focus on the topics of leadership, decision making, and group interaction, under the facilitation of their Small Schools Coach. Each month, the teacher-leader whose turn it is to plan and facilitate the agenda for the leadership council meeting becomes the subject of the teacher-leaders' CFG meeting. The school coach meets with this person and helps him to reflect on the leadership challenges he has experienced within his small school. He helps him form "inquiry questions" to bring to the teacher-leader group where his colleagues provide feedback and advice. The group has developed trust over the course of the school year, which began with readings about leadership and discussions of what values guide each person's leadership style.

Chestnut's principal organized a daylong retreat with the teacher-leaders to begin building the capacity for leadership within the small schools, "so they can start to develop the skill set to be instructional leaders or lead teachers in the instructional agreement for their [small schools]." The hope is that each small school will select a defined instructional model that suits their unique focus. "We want them to have the autonomy to choose what their curricular vision looks like. We do have a district curriculum, but how they get there ... If they want problem-based learning, Understanding by Design, whatever model it might be, that's fine. Just

so long as it's backed by research and it's known to be good for our kids.” He is hoping that having teacher-leaders be the ones to direct the conversation will have more impact than a top-down suggestion.

The development of instructional feedback teams in Elm’s building is an effort to build and broaden the whole school’s instructional leadership capacity, as directed by one of the school’s assistant principals. The teams were formed to enable volunteer groups of teachers to go deeper into development of instructional skills and knowledge. This started as two groups and a total of twenty teachers, but reduced to one group of about ten teachers who continue to meet weekly. Teachers focus on goal-setting and collecting data while observing in each other’s classes. “It’s been really good having someone else come in and be a different set of eyes—it’s not a judgmental set of eyes—it’s just like, what can I do to help you? What data can I take? What can I look for that you don’t have time to? And so I think that’s been really good.”

Participating in the group has heightened one teacher’s awareness of his own practice:

I’m more conscious of finding data to ... see whether or not the things that I’m doing are making a difference or if I’m just doing a lot of work for nothing ... The conversations that we’ve had in that group ... talking about instruction and ... seeing some ways to evaluate learning ... It’s been really good. When you feel like you’re finally going to give up and it’s just not worth all the effort, then you go in there and you ... keep going and you’re doing the right thing. And I’ve got some ideas of different things to do.

Teachers participate in the instructional feedback teams voluntarily and the district has supported the effort with financial incentives. However, not all teachers who might take advantage of this opportunity do because it is seen as requiring a lot of additional time and energy.

Cedar is the one small school whose teacher-leaders are creating opportunities to develop teachers’ leadership capacity. As they began their second year of implementation, the teacher-leaders felt that they had done “a lot of setup work”

“We are not looking for outsiders to tell us how to do things anymore.”

Teacher at Cedar School

and needed to get more focused in their professional work by concentrating on the issues of teaching and learning. Their plan is to rely on the expertise of their peers. “We are not looking for outsiders to tell us how to do things anymore ... If I give a lesson and I don’t get the results I want, I think there’s somebody in my academy who can say, ‘Maybe here’s the reason you didn’t get it.’” Cedar teachers regularly participate in CFGs and each of the teachers will attend a training to prepare for the new program they are implementing with the ninth and tenth grades.

While few of the schools have policies and structures in place to build and sustain leadership capacity among their members, these examples represent a promising start. Principals, assistant principals, teacher-leaders, and teachers are beginning to develop their respective new roles and to realize their collective capacity to lead school change.

This report provides a look at how leadership is being distributed in seven redesigned small high schools. As we assess the schools' progress, we are left with a number of questions about the support structures and sustainability of each small school's efforts to distribute leadership.

What will be the roles of the traditional building leaders (principal, assistant principal, and leadership council) and how will these roles be redefined to support the ongoing restructuring work in each small school?

¹¹ Mohr, 2000

According to Nancy Mohr, founder of University Heights High School in New York City, "Building a small school is too much trouble unless an integral part of its mission is creating new ways of working together and shifting power and authority."¹¹ However, identifying new as well as evolving leadership roles and governance structures, and determining how to support them, are areas that all of the schools struggle with as the locus of power and authority changes.

The role of the principal is evolving in each of the small schools. While four of them have moved further toward distributed leadership and away from a traditional school hierarchy, none of the sites/buildings/districts has formally acknowledged this change with a revised job description or contract. As a result, principals continue to be where "the buck stops."

[Teachers] know that I am where "the buck stops" for the entire school. If they don't like an answer they got from their small school administrator, they'll come to me. Or if they don't want to deal with the small school leadership and just want to go straight to the top, they'll come to me.

As schools strive to maximize limited resources and create leadership and governance structures to support these new small schools, one possibility is that the role of the building principal may be significantly diminished or may eventually cease to exist. Instead, each small school will have its own administrator. For example, at the Julia Richman Complex in New York City, one of the building principals serves as the building coordinator and is responsible, along with the building council, for deciding on issues impacting all of the small schools, such as the use of shared space.

In addition, we wonder how the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal will change to support the work of the six newly formed small schools. As the role of the principal changes, will the assistant principal job be redefined so that these leaders have fewer or no building-wide responsibilities, such as discipline, and more small-school-specific responsibilities? The data indicate that this shift is beginning on a limited basis. However, in every school, the assistant principal(s) continued to have significant building responsibilities in addition to small school supervision. We wonder how the emerging roles of these leaders will ultimately be defined and supported at the building and district level.

Finally, we wonder about the role of the building leadership council. Although in many buildings these councils have helped to coordinate building-wide concerns such as establishing common behavioral standards, facility use, student registration, and open houses, councils also typically make decisions that could reasonably be devolved to each small school. For now, much key decision making remains centralized.

How will teacher-leaders be identified, trained, and supported over time?

All six of the small schools located within conversion buildings have developed teacher-leader positions. However, only in the building that houses Alder have significant structures been implemented to train and support these new leaders. In this building, a teacher-leader job description has been developed by the building leadership council. Through the use of grant money, each teacher-leader was also supported with .75 release time for one year to devote to the responsibilities of the position, and the opportunity to participate in a regular Critical Friends Group with other teacher-leader colleagues from the building.

Teacher-leaders spoke of vagueness in the descriptions of their roles and how this uncertainty can undercut a teacher-leader's authority. If these new leaders and their respective roles are to be sustained, how will building administrators and district leadership provide the necessary supports to sustain them? What efforts can teacher-leaders within a building initiate on their own, instead of waiting for "permission" to act? And finally, how can a building's culture be reinvented in order to legitimize these new leaders and capitalize on the possibility of their new roles?

Where does the student's voice fit into a new distributed leadership and decision-making structure?

None of the schools in this study has included students in a regular or systematic way in their decision-making structures. When asked about school decisions in which they have a voice, students in all seven schools mentioned voting in building-wide ASB elections. Students in three of the small schools talked about participating in isolated small school decisions, such as voting on their small school logo. Only at Chestnut did the students recount how one teacher spent time sharing information about how the school was considering moving to a block schedule and asking for student input on this decision. We wonder in what other ways schools might consider involving students in decision making and leadership structures beyond token committee membership and how students might become routinely involved in developing each small school's changing culture.

Placing increased attention on student voice is consistent with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's overall goal of graduating "all students work-, college-, citizenship-ready." While the Foundation has focused its resources on graduating college-ready students, schools might reasonably undertake addressing the preparation of students for citizenship as part of building a strong and inclusive school culture and set of practices.

What could be developed at the district level to sustain and support distributed leadership?

Of the seven schools included in this study, five received their grants and conducted their reform work without significant district collaboration. The data indicate that principals' demands on their district offices are changing across the board. The conversion process has intensified schools' needs for changes in district support. District leaders can either enable or constrain the work of schools through the exercise of their formal authority for decision making on a number of fronts. For example, districts are still allocating teachers to the high schools as a whole

¹² See *Elevating the Conversation: Building Professional Community in Small High Schools*, which can be downloaded from <http://www.smallschoolsproject.org>; look under "Small Schools In Action/What We Are Learning."

building, "not recognizing the demands that each of our five small schools has for staffing." We anticipate that the small schools' need for different structures and supports at the district level will continue to grow.

The data in this report and in an earlier report on professional community¹² indicate that teachers need time to meet and plan together if they are to change classroom practice. Ensuring that small schools have significant and sustained time for teachers to meet and plan together and engage in professional development based on their needs is a critical area where districts can increase their support of small schools.

During the first year of the grant, many districts provided additional time for schools to engage in planning. In retrospect, that time was clearly intended for schools to build a plan for meeting the grant's goals, not as recognition that educators need regular and ongoing time for collaborative planning, reflection, and professional development. Consequently, the number of additional late arrival or early release days has been reduced dramatically or has disappeared altogether.

Principals reported that the most significant support that district leaders provided was to demonstrate public support for the small schools effort, certainly a pivotal role for a district. We wonder how district leaders can provide more support to small schools, beyond the cheerleading and public relations work.

One key area might best be described as the ability or willingness of a district to differentiate between and among its schools. Principals and superintendents talked about the district's priority to treat each of their high schools the same. At least two of the districts involved in the study have an explicit or evolving commitment to have each of their high schools be as alike as possible. Other grantee schools are part of districts that seek to standardize course offerings and content across schools, and more than one is beginning to have district-wide end-of-course testing.

In these instances, districts appear to be choosing for standardization of offerings and resources, and operating on the premise that "fair" translates to "the same." This is occurring at a time when their grantee schools are encouraged to create small schools that are "focused, distinctive, and deliberately 'uncomprehensive'"¹³ and when the Gates Foundation is promoting a portfolio of choices for families and students at the high school level. We wonder if districts will be able to adopt policies and procedures that promote differentiation as not only inevitable but healthy, and make distinctions between and among schools based on numerous factors, including variations in student populations and varied ways schools might choose to meet the district's performance standards for students.

Another area where districts can support the work of small schools is by recognizing and legitimizing each small school as a separate entity. For example, how does the district communicate with the leaders in a building? Is communication only through the principal or are assistant principals and teacher-leaders included? How is hiring handled? Does each small school have responsibility for hiring its own staff or is staffing determined by building and district leaders? When there is a principal vacancy, are the teacher-leaders integrated into the interview process and the creation of a job description? Does each school have its own school number with the Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction, at least for data definition purposes? Districts could go a long way toward supporting small schools by

¹³ Wallach & Lear, 2005

collecting and reporting data by small school and redesigning systems, such as those for student registration and reporting grades, to be small school friendly.

How can small schools exercise more independence and self-sufficiency in the context of district and union constraints?

This area is closely related to the level and nature of district support for small schools. One teacher explained, “There is no doubt that the small school’s sphere of influence is increasing,” but it is “decidedly mitigated by constraints from outside sources such as building administration, district office, and even the union. Many ideas hatched by [small schools] are squelched because of these influences.” Similarly, when the leadership council makes decisions on behalf of the entire building, one small school cannot act without the consent of the others.

The teacher union contract can have an analogous effect. In its efforts to protect teachers’ wages, benefits, and working conditions throughout the district, the contract may require a “super-majority” vote to enact changes in a teacher’s workday, such that within a building, an entire staff must agree to policies that may affect only, say, the one-fifth of its members in a particular small school.

A building principal described one such scenario—two of the five small schools in his building wanted to create an advisory period that would require teachers to exceed the 300-minute instructional day limit by five minutes. But, “because it was a deviation from the contract,” when it went to a vote of the entire staff, “it went down in flames.” This creates a situation where small schools are “autonomous within a box and the box is the teacher contract.” A district decision to provide each small school with its own school number might readily lead to a contract revision that recognizes each small school as its own entity, and thereby more in control of its own fate than is currently the case in most instances.

Leadership is changing in the seven redesigned small schools. These schools are making changes to a traditional leadership structure by distributing decision-making authority about teaching and learning among those who are directly involved in implementing those decisions. This distributed leadership model is progressing at a different rate in each small school.

We found the most dramatic institutional change in school leadership to be the naming of teacher-leaders to head the small schools. We also found that the responsibilities, activities, and support of these leaders vary widely. These variations range from one teacher-leader who has .75 FTE release time, professional development support, a job description, and a position on the leadership team to a teacher-leader whose job is ill-defined, has little authority, and no additional time or support for developing leadership skills.

As with many aspects of school redesign, change to more widely distributed leadership depends on the willingness of the building administrator—and in many cases, district administrators—to support small schools by delegating authority and charging the small school staff with direct responsibility and accountability for teaching and learning. In this regard, we saw differences in the ways principals approached their new roles in school change. We also found that while principals and assistant principals are working directly with one or two small schools, they are distracted by time-consuming building responsibilities.

Teachers are participating in the leadership of their small schools by collaborating on special projects, curriculum, and other specific tasks. These kinds of leadership activities take advantage of a teacher's expertise, interest, and knowledge of students, allowing for direct and immediate results in instructional change.

While we see many examples of how greater distributed leadership is paving the way for instructional change, we are concerned that substantial challenges have yet to be met. The traditional administrative and teaching patterns have served the comprehensive high school for many years and enjoy the support of custom and policy, so a move to widely distributed leadership and collaborative practice raises uncomfortable questions about authority, responsibility, and accountability. Teacher unions, historically devoted to teacher welfare, derive strength for their members from a "one contract fits all" practice that does not yet accommodate a diverse leadership configuration. Increasingly scarce resources of time, space, and money to support distributed leadership obstruct even the best intentions.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that progress is being made, that many teachers and administrators have a vision of how to get to effective broadened leadership, and that once started down this road, turning back is very difficult. In the coming year, we will continue to track these schools as they move toward a style of distributed leadership to support effective small schools.

Between fall 2003 and spring 2006, the Small Schools Project research team will conduct on-site observations, interviews, focus groups, and document review. The data collection for this report included the following methods:

Interviews

- Superintendent or district administrator from each district
- Building principal
- Assistant principal or administrator assigned to each small school
- Teacher-leader from each small school
- Teachers from each small school

Focus Groups

- Freshman student focus groups (year one) and sophomore student focus groups (year two) in each school to capture impressions of students who are new to the small school
- Junior student focus groups (year one) in each small school to capture impressions of students who straddle the school restructuring work.

Observations and Document Review

- Shadowing administrators and teacher-leaders from each small school
- Observations of teacher work groups, and curriculum and program planning
- Review of small school documents, policies, procedures, schedules, professional development plans, etc.

Gates Foundation Seven Attributes of High Achievement Schools

- Common Focus
- Time to Collaborate
- High Expectations
- Performance Based
- Technology as a Tool
- Personalized
- Respect & Responsibility

Gates Foundation Essential Components of Teaching and Learning

- **Active Inquiry** Students are engaged in active participation, exploration, and research; activities draw out perceptions and develop understanding; students are encouraged to make decisions about their learning, and teachers utilize the diverse experiences of students to build effective learning experiences.
- **In-Depth Learning** The focus is competence, not coverage. Students struggle with complex problems, explore core concepts to develop deep understanding; and apply knowledge in real-world contexts.
- **Performance Assessment** Clear expectations define what students should know and be able to do; students produce quality work products and present to real audiences; student work shows evidence of understanding, not just recall; assessment tasks allow students to exhibit higher-order thinking; and teachers and students set learning goals and monitor progress.

Washington's public schools, like those in most other states, are embedded in an ongoing statewide effort to reform and improve student achievement. In Washington, the reform effort both supports and constrains the serious work of school redesign. After a decade of uncoordinated efforts following the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, Washington State reform took serious hold with the passage of House Bill 1209 in the Spring of 1993.¹⁴

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Education, 1983.

The state reform effort is known informally as “1209”—as in “1209 requires us to...”—and is notable for its intention to move the state to a standards- and performance-based system of K-12 education. When passed, House Bill 1209 contained provisions for substantial professional development to accompany the move to a standards-based system, charged the superintendent of public instruction (an elected position) with developing a system of assessment that would provide the state's citizens with evidence that schools and districts were indeed educating students well, and required the state's institutions of higher education to admit students on the basis of competencies, as well as credits.

As required by House Bill 1209, the state developed a set of standards known as Essential Academic Learning Requirements (informally called “EALRs”) in reading, writing, communication, math, science, social studies, the arts, and health and fitness. The EALRs defined benchmarks for grades 4, 7, and 10; districts were responsible for determining the learning expectations in other grades. Similar to standards in other states, the EALRs are now widely used, especially in elementary and middle schools. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) also created K-10 Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) to provide specific learning standards for students in grades K-10, clarifying the skills and strategies all students need to demonstrate proficiency in each content area. The GLEs will be used to create new reading and math assessments for grades three through eight and ten beginning in 2006, as required by the federal No Child Left Behind legislation.

House Bill 1209 also created what is now known as the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, or WASL, a test that would be administered to virtually all students in grades four, seven, and ten, and provides the state with a “snapshot” of how the state's schools are doing. The WASL has been phased in over the past several years, with the science test making its debut in the spring of 2003.¹⁵

¹⁵ The science WASL is administered in grades five, eight, and ten.

During the 2003 legislative session, the Washington State legislature approved the requirements for the Certificate of Academic Achievement (formerly the Certificate of Mastery), which requires the class of 2008 to pass the WASL in reading, writing, and math in order to graduate.¹⁶ Students in the class of 2010 will also have to pass the science WASL. Students who do not pass the WASL the first time around will have up to four opportunities to retake it.

¹⁶ In addition to earning the Certificate of Academic Achievement, students must also complete a culminating project, craft a “high school and beyond” plan, and meet credit requirements in order to graduate.

While the WASL will not be “high stakes” until 2006, when the class of 2008 takes and must pass the 10th-grade test, the results are already widely reported in the media, and, in some districts, principal evaluations are based in part on improving WASL scores. The 2003 WASL results show that 64 percent of students met the standard in reading, 65 percent met the standard in writing, and 44 percent in math. However, only 38.9 percent of the students passed all three sections of the test.¹⁷ Without dramatic improvement, six out of ten students will not graduate from Washington high schools in 2008.

¹⁷ Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction website, <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us>; look under “State Results.”

The Washington State Board of Education is on record saying that the current high school graduation system, based on seat time and credits, acts as an impediment to standards-based reform. The board has repeatedly and publicly indicated that it will be pleased to entertain requests for waivers from schools, particularly high schools, engaged in substantial reform. Two Gates grantees requested an array of waivers and they were granted without delay. To date, these two schools, plus a school that does not have grant support from the Gates Foundation, are the only schools in Washington to request waivers related to school reform.

In the spring of 2004, the Washington legislature passed—and Governor Gary Locke signed—legislation to allow for the creation of 45 new public charter schools to serve primarily educationally disadvantaged students during the following six years. Following the law’s passage, the Washington Education Association led a signature drive to create Referendum 55, a statewide initiative, which put the issue before the voters during the 2004 elections. In the November 2004 elections, R-55 was overwhelmingly voted down—the third time Washington voters rejected charter schools.

During the 2005 session, the Washington legislature considered, but did not pass, legislation that would have codified OSPI’s plans to develop an alternative assessment for students unable to successfully pass the WASL, but who want to earn the Certificate of Academic Achievement. The state plans to pilot two alternative assessments during the 2005–2006 school year, with implementation the following year; the alternative assessments must be approved by the legislature.

¹⁸ Alder's Leadership Council developed this job description for the 2005–2006 school year.

The primary responsibility of the teacher-leader is to serve as an instructional coach for a small school, supporting and facilitating the continual growth of staff in instructional practices that align with the small school's vision. The teacher-leader's work will involve all of the following tasks at some point over the course of a school year, though the degree to which any of these are accomplished will be determined by the needs of the small school's staff and students.¹⁸

Keeper of the Vision

- Work to maintain and carry forward the vision of the school through small school activities and curriculum development.

Professional Development/Teaching and Learning

- Serve as an advocate/model for student-centered, powerful teaching and learning.
- Work with all small school staff encouraging quality teaching and learning.
- Conduct and facilitate peer observations.
- Facilitate curriculum development.
- Facilitate the process of planning, implementing, and nurturing professional development in effective teaching practices (including reading strategies, performance assessment, independent student learning, senior project, etc.).
- Support the process of crafting, implementing, monitoring and revising the small school's School Improvement Plan (SIP).
- Cover classes to release colleagues to work with other colleagues.
- Support personalization and advisory in the small school.
- Encourage leadership from all staff (not just the teacher-leader).

Communications

- Facilitate small school staff meetings (includes "student of concern" meetings).
- Coordinate communications with small school staff, other small schools, and administration.

Leadership Team Work

- Facilitate and attend meetings and subcommittees for small school.
- Facilitate and attend teacher-leader meetings.

If you are interested in learning more about leadership in small schools and how to develop distributed leadership structures and capacity in your school, we encourage you to review the following resources.

How to Thrive as a Teacher Leader

John G. Gabriel

This book explores the responsibilities and rewards of teacher leadership, offering practical, positive advice on:

- Identifying leadership qualities and building a team,
- Enhancing communication and earning respect,
- Overcoming obstacles and implementing change,
- Energizing colleagues and strengthening morale, and
- Improving student and teacher achievement.

From setting goals to mediating conflicts, from mentoring colleagues to motivating students, Gabriel provides clear strategies—grounded in experience and illustrated by examples—for becoming an effective teacher-leader. A generous resource section, including sample letters, surveys, and checklists, enables readers to quickly put these techniques into practice.

Leadership & Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action

Michael Fullan

This book provides a comprehensive examination of what leaders at all levels of the educational system can do to pave the way for large-scale, sustainable reform. Building on ideas established in his best-selling publication, *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, author Michael Fullan confronts a question that has never been addressed before: How do you develop and sustain a greater number of system thinkers in action, or new theoreticians? These proactive system leaders are at the heart of the issue of sustainability, for they are the ones to bring about deeper reform while simultaneously helping to produce other theoreticians working on the same issues.

Learning by Heart

Roland Barth

Drawing from a career committed to building schools rich in community, learning, and leadership, Barth shows how to accomplish the most difficult task of school reform—transforming a school’s culture so that it will be hospitable to human learning. In an engaging conversational style, he suggests how school people can become the architects, engineers, and designers of their own schools—and of their own destinies.

The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups

Bob Garmston and Bruce M. Wellman

In this book, the authors survey a broad range of organizational and educational literature and sourcebooks to present a useful guide for educational leaders who

wish to affect change. Chapter topics deal with communication, facilitation, organizing and managing meetings, group and institutional development, and conflict resolution and management. In addition, the authors outline practical strategies for creating action-oriented and outcomes-based collaborative groups in a school community.

Who Will Save Our Schools?: Teachers as Constructivist Leaders

*Linda Lambert, Michelle Collay, Mary Dietz, Karen Kent,
and Anna Ershler Richert*

This book takes a compelling new look at the role teachers must play in the future of schooling. Topics include:

- Why teachers must take the lead in creating a new context for teaching and learning;
- How “constructivist leaders” make meaning of learning;
- What an ecological perspective will do to initiate and sustain learning communities in schools;
- How the parallel roles of leadership with adults and leadership with children emerge in the role of a teacher-leader; and
- Which skills, commitments, and knowledge are essential for teachers as leaders.

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